



Review of Global Parent-Child Reading Research

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Abstract— Parent-child shared reading serves as a core approach to early family education, spanning multiple research fields including pedagogy, library science and child developmental psychology. Drawing on literature from the Web of Science database, this paper systematically sorts out existing studies along two dimensions: the developmental effects of parent-child reading and global parent-child reading promotion programs. Empirical studies have verified that parent-child shared reading can remarkably enhance the linguistic, literacy and cognitive abilities of typical children, low-income children and autistic children with special needs. Reading duration, parental involvement and family cultural attainment act as key influencing variables. Internationally, sophisticated collaborative promotion models involving libraries, medical institutions and charitable organizations have taken shape, with representative initiatives such as Britain's Bookstart, Australia's Better Beginnings, and America's ECRR and ROR. These programs effectively improve household reading environments and increase the frequency of shared reading, yet they confront practical obstacles during implementation, such as disparate willingness to carry out programs among different practitioners.



Keywords— Early education, Early literacy, Family reading, Parent-child reading, Reading promotion

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading lays the foundation for the development of children's lifelong learning competencies. As a vital vehicle of early family education, parent-child shared reading for young children delivers multiple values including linguistic enlightenment, cultivation of reading habits, and maintenance of intimate parent-child bonds, and has long remained a core research focus at the interdisciplinary intersection of pedagogy, library science, and child developmental psychology. Existing literature on parent-child reading is fragmented yet broadly categorized into two strands: research on the developmental effects of parent-child reading, and research on parent-child reading promotion initiatives. Against this backdrop, the present

paper systematically screens literature from the Web of Science database to review and analyze the current state of relevant studies on parent-child reading.

II. REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Existing relevant studies fall into two categories: research on family-involved parent-child reading, and research on family-participated parent-child reading promotion programs. On the one hand, studies concerning family-involved parent-child reading mainly focus on parental impacts on children's growth and development as well as optimization strategies. Empirical evidence confirms that parent-child reading facilitates children's linguistic competence, reading habit formation and mental

health, while parental engagement level and educational attainment exert critical effects on reading outcomes. On the other hand, research on family-participated reading promotion projects centers on the effectiveness, operational models and optimization measures of reading outreach. Such research covers a wide range of organizations, including public libraries, library associations, charitable institutions and medical and health agencies.

(1) Review of Research on the Effects of Parent-Child Reading

Parent-child reading exerts positive effects on children's reading proficiency, expressive competence, character recognition and writing skills. Such benefits are universal: they apply not only to children from middle-class families, but also significantly boost vocabulary and literacy development among children from low-income households and those with reading difficulties.

Dowdall (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 randomized controlled trials and verified that shared picture book reading with parents positively improves children's reading and expressive abilities in early childhood, with such benefits closely correlated to reading duration. Findings indicate that daily shared reading exceeding 60 minutes yields the most prominent promotion of children's linguistic development. Lorio (2022) pointed out that joint parent-child reading fosters character acquisition in early education. Pecukonis (2025) studied autistic preschoolers and found that despite inherent reading difficulties, active parental involvement still generates positive progress in their language proficiency.

Bracken (2008) performed a follow-up survey of 233 low-income families. Multiple regression analysis identified parent-child reading as a prominent predictor of children's receptive vocabulary and literacy growth, demonstrating its favorable role in early character learning. Sénéchal (2002) carried out a five-year longitudinal study of 168 children from middle-class families, proving that parental reading involvement advances children's word-writing and reading capabilities.

Kumar (2016) implemented a randomized controlled trial tracking 30 adolescent mothers with infants aged 6 to 20 months at an adolescent clinic in downtown Toronto.

During three successive pediatric checkups, intervention families received new children's books, age-tailored reading guidance, librarian consultation access and public library cards, whereas control families received standard medical care. Bivariate analysis revealed that mothers in the intervention group were far more likely to cultivate reading as one of their children's favorite activities.

Family engagement is directly linked to the efficacy of children's reading promotion. Chen (2016) interviewed 200 parents of infants aged 6 to 18 months at a pediatric clinic, discovering that parents who visited public libraries and knew about children's reading programs maintained higher frequencies of shared reading compared with others.

(2) Review of Research on Parent-Child Reading Promotion Programs

Launched by BookTrust, Bookstart is the world's first national free book-gifting reading promotion program for infants and toddlers. Its pilot rolled out in Birmingham in 1992. It aims to foster children's lifelong reading interest from birth and boost their early linguistic and emotional development. At present, it covers over 90% of newborns in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, benefiting approximately 1.4 million children annually. Hall (2001) explored how early reading intervention via Bookstart shapes infants' linguistic development and confirmed that Bookstart motivates parents to engage in active verbal interaction with their babies. Controlled experiments revealed that children without Bookstart intervention lag behind their peers receiving the program in language development. Wade (1998) conducted a controlled trial on first-year school pupils and found that children who received Bookstart book packs achieved better performance in numeracy and literacy.

Better Beginnings is a statewide family literacy program developed and administered by the State Library of Western Australia. It empowers parents to act as their children's first teachers and builds solid learning foundations for all children in Western Australia through early reading and verbal interaction. Initiated in 2004, the program has run for more than 20 years and serves over 80,000 families each year across all local government areas of Western Australia. Barratt-Pugh (2011) conducted a follow-up evaluation of typical communities in Western

Australia from 2004 to 2010. The results demonstrated remarkable improvements in parent-child reading participation rates, reading quality and family literacy environments, alongside substantial growth in children's reading interest, parents' reading proficiency and library membership registrations. A survey indicated that 51% of mothers did not read with their infants before the program, while the figure dropped after implementation, with 85% of mothers engaging in shared reading and 67% maintaining daily regular sessions (compared with merely 23% pre-program). Meanwhile, the average household book collection rose from 15–20 volumes to 49, and 44% of families with no age-appropriate books built their first home book collections. Allen (2009) noted that Better Beginnings cultivated a stronger reading atmosphere at home; surveys showed that reading activities for young children could raise older siblings' reading frequency, forming an intergenerational spillover effect.

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) is a national early reading promotion program jointly launched by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). It empowers caregivers through libraries, supplies reading resources for families, builds reading readiness for children aged 0–5, and lays groundwork for lifelong learning. More than 6,000 libraries across the United States have adopted ECRR toolkits to deliver the program. ECRR drives libraries to proactively encourage parental participation in shared reading, facilitating children's development of early literacy, print awareness, narrative skills, phonological awareness and vocabulary. ALSC researchers argued that ECRR marks a fundamental shift in library children's services: librarians previously focused solely on children rather than caregiver education, yet family involvement facilitated by ECRR generates greater impacts on early literacy acquisition.

Reach Out and Read (ROR) is a nationwide early childhood literacy promotion initiative established in 1989, the only pediatric literacy model officially endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). During routine pediatric check-ups, clinicians provide age-customized reading advice for parents, distribute free children's books after consultations, and follow up on family reading practices at subsequent visits with further guidance. ROR

posits that the first three years of life constitute a critical window for rapid brain growth and language formation. As children's primary mentors, parents exert profound influences on their cognitive, social and emotional development. The program encourages daily parent-child reading as a fixed family ritual to strengthen parent-child bonds and cultivate reading enthusiasm. Sharif (2002) surveyed 200 families across two healthcare centers and found that children participating in ROR exhibited stronger receptive vocabulary. Needlman (2005) investigated 1,647 children aged 6 to 72 months from 19 medical centers across 10 U.S. states, including 730 intervention families receiving ROR and 917 control families. After controlling for multiple confounding variables, the study found that families engaging in regular shared reading via ROR boosted children's literacy and numeracy skills, with a 1.5-fold higher likelihood of bedtime reading and picture book purchases compared with the control group. Kumar (2016) further discovered additional benefits of ROR: it increases shared reading volume and advances children's linguistic development while alleviating maternal postpartum depression. The study tracked 30 adolescent mothers within one year of childbirth in downtown Toronto and verified that ROR boosted maternal fondness for reading and mitigated depressive symptoms after delivery.

Children from low-income households are more prone to delays in linguistic and literacy development at school entry and throughout life compared with their more affluent peers. Thanks to its low-cost and public welfare attributes, ROR has secured bipartisan financial support from the U.S. Congress, ensuring low-income families can access its benefits. Nevertheless, existing research identifies obstacles to nationwide ROR rollout. Stone's research revealed divergent attitudes among medical staff during program implementation: physicians with personal shared reading experience or experience treating children who benefited from ROR actively recommend the program to families, whereas overloaded nurses and medical assistants prioritize short-term costs and display low willingness to carry out the initiative.

III. CONCLUSIONS

(1) research outcomes

Overall, academia has accumulated systematic research concerning family-engaged shared reading and its corresponding outreach programs. Prior scholarship empirically corroborates that family engagement exerts salutary effects on children's linguistic proficiency, reading habit formation, cognitive maturation and psychological wellness. Furthermore, diversified intervention programs have generated implementable operational frameworks for shared reading practices, delivering substantial theoretical and practical implications for advancing parent-child reading undertakings and optimizing the public cultural service system.

Extant literature exhibits three salient attributes: robust empirical underpinnings, multi-faceted analytical dimensions, and sophisticated outreach governance models. Concerning foundational research on family-participated shared reading, scholarly inquiries prioritize effect validation and determinant decomposition with strong applied value. First, research samples encompass heterogeneous cohorts, covering children from middle-class households, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and neurodivergent preschoolers with autism spectrum conditions, thereby substantiating the generalizability of the developmental benefits yielded by shared reading. Second, quantitative methodologies predominate empirical investigations. Rigorous analytical paradigms, including randomized controlled trials, longitudinal cohort studies and multiple regression models, are deployed to quantitatively calibrate the marginal impacts of core covariates, namely daily shared reading duration, parental involvement intensity and familial educational capital. Third, granular, actionable research outputs furnish explicit operational guidelines for frontline shared reading implementation.

With respect to program-centric research, integrated multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanisms have been established, with extensive participation from public libraries, philanthropic foundations and healthcare institutions. Flagship international initiatives include the UK's Bookstart, the U.S. Reach Out and Read (ROR), and Australia's Better Beginnings. These schemes significantly elevate the participation frequency and quality of parent-child reading. In parallel, researchers conduct long-term outcome monitoring and critical reflective

evaluation of program limitations. While empirical evidence attests to the programs' facilitative roles in children's literacy acquisition and household reading ecology, extant studies also pinpoint tangible implementation obstacles, notably disparate implementation motivation across occupational groups.

(2) Research Prospects

Looking ahead, future research can expand in three directions. First, scholars should carry out cross-national comparative research and localized empirical investigations to enrich theoretical explanations adaptable to diverse cultural and family structures. Second, long-term longitudinal follow-up research should be strengthened to capture the long-run cumulative effects of early shared reading on adolescents' academic performance and social adaptation. Third, an integrated research paradigm combining micro-family behavior analysis and macro institutional promotion evaluation should be built, to optimize multi-agency collaborative intervention strategies and narrow the literacy development gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children. Meanwhile, more heterogeneous special groups ought to be included in research samples, so as to develop inclusive, targeted parent-child reading promotion solutions for all types of families.

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